



*Nothing is politically right
that is morally wrong.*

MISSOURI SENATE
JEFFERSON CITY

*Free and fair discussion
is the firmest friend of truth.*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 13, 2006

Senate Votes to Crack Down on Medicaid Fraud *Senate Advances Three Healthcare Reform Bills to the House*

JEFFERSON CITY— The Senate advanced three bills today that crack down on healthcare thieves and give patients the information they need to make better choices when buying prescription drugs.

Senate Bill 1210 stiffens the penalties for Medicaid providers that defraud the system. Sen. Chris Koster, R-Harrisonville, sponsored the bill based on recommendations from the Senate Special Committee to Investigate Medicaid Fraud created earlier this year.

Many experts believe as much as \$575 million of taxpayer money is stolen from the Medicaid system each year due to fraud committed by medical providers who participate in the state-funded healthcare program. Examples of common fraud include overstating the number of hours devoted to Medicaid recipients, billing Medicaid multiple times for the same service or for prescriptions that the patients never ordered.

“I can think of no crime more disgusting than stealing from the poor,” Koster said. “By disciplining those who do not play by the rules, we can make sure Medicaid is used for its intended purposes, and not to further line the pockets of corrupt Medicaid kingpins.”

The measure increases the crime of fraud to a Class C felony and requires those convicted to serve at least 85 percent of their sentence before they are eligible for parole. It also permanently bans perpetrators from participating in the state program ever again.

The bill also aims to encourage whistleblowers to come forward by offering 20 to 35 percent of the money recovered by the state. Furthermore, the measure protects the employment status of inside informers, as well as shields providers from false accusations by sealing the lawsuit until the attorney general can reach a conclusion about the allegations.

Senate Bill 1041 cracks down on a different kind of healthcare thief. The measure, sponsored by Senate President Pro Tem Michael R. Gibbons, R-Kirkwood, creates a crime to

-MORE-

punish those who would try to steal anyone's electronic medical records. Depending on the number of offenses, individuals will face either a Class D or Class C felony for misusing, in anyway, someone's personal health information.

"Electronic medical records can save lives and save money, but patients need to know their information is safe," Gibbons said. "Creating these severe penalties will help keep those records safe."

The Senate also advanced Senate Bill 1239 that gives patients the information they need to make good healthcare decisions concerning prescription drugs. The bill requires the Department of Social Services to launch the website www.modrugcosts.com by Jan. 1, 2007. The website will list the prices Missouri pharmacies charge for the 50 most commonly prescribed drugs. Price comparison websites launched in other states, such as Florida, have proven to reduce costs. There will also be a toll-free number people can call for the drug cost comparison information.

"Unfortunately, patients are usually the last person to make their own healthcare decisions," Gibbons said. "People have the right to know what pharmacies are charging them so they can make their own choices about what is best and most affordable for them."

All three bills now move to the House where they will undergo similar consideration.

###